

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T CAIRO 1996

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EG, IS

SUBJECT: SINAI FIELD MISSION

REF: PARA 2, CAIRO 1980

1. SUMMARY: FAHMY EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT PUBLICITY ASPECTS OF SFM AND URGES USG REFUSE TO PERMIT PRESS VISITS TO SITE. PUBLICITY RESULTING FROM VISITS WILL BE SEIZED UPON BY SYRIA, LIBYA AND OTHER ARAB CRITICS FURTHER TO PILLORY SADAT.

NOTING WIDESPREAD AMERICAN CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC CONCERN ABOUT AMERICAN PRESENCE IN SINAI, I URGED GOE UNDERSTAND NEED FOR LEGITIMATE PRESS INTEREST IN SFM. FAHMY WANTS GOE CONCERN BROUGHT TO YOUR AND, IF NECESSARY, THE PRESIDENT'S ATTENTION. MEANWHILE, THORNE IS AWAITING DEPT'S GUIDANCE RE PROPOSED FEB 22 CEREMONY AND HANDLING PRESS REQUESTS TO VISIT SITE. END SUMMARY

2. AN IRATE FAHMY CALLED ME THIS MORNING TO SAY THAT GAMASY HAD TOLD HIM ABOUT PROPOSAL AS CONVEYED BY THORNE TO STAGE CEREMONY AT SFM SITE ON FEB 22, WHICH MIGHT BE ATTENDED BY THE PRESS AND
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TOON AND MYSELF. THIS WAS ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE

TO GOE. ALTHOUGH GOE MAY NOT BE IN PHYSICAL CONTROL OF THE TERRITORY INVOLVED, HE HOPED USG IS NOT QUESTIONING EGYPTIAN SOVEREIGNTY OVER SINAI.

3. IN AGREEING TO US SURVEILLANCE PRESENCE IN SINAI, GOE DID NOT WANT THIS TO BECOME A "CIRCUS" TO WHICH ALL AND SUNDRY WILL BE INVITED. GOE IS ALREADY BEING PILLORIED BY SYRIA, LIBYA AND OTHER ARAB CRITICS FOR AGREEING TO AMERICAN PRESENCE IN SINAI. TO MAKE A BIG SPLASH BY PERMITTING BEVY OF NEWSMEN TO ATTEND WILL ONLY ADD TO PROBLEMS WHICH GOE IS CURRENTLY FACING AS A RESULT OF SINAI II. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES, SHOULD TOON OR I VISIT SITE, EITHER TOGETHER OR SEPARATELY. SUCH VISITS WOULD ALSO BE WIDELY PUBLICIZED AND BE SEIZED UPON BY GOE CRITICS. IN FAHMY'S VIEW, SFM CAN DO ITS JOB WITHOUT HIGH LEVEL OF PUBLICITY.

4. I TOLD FAHMY THAT GOE MUST EXPECT LEGITIMATE AMERICAN AND FOREIGN PRESS INTEREST IN SFM OPERATION. WHILE EGYPTIANS CAN ON THEIR SIDE STOP NEWSMEN FROM GOING IN, NEITHER THEY NOR WE CAN STOP ISRAELIS FROM PERMITTING THEM IN. IN THIS CONNECTION, I MENTIONED IDF INVITATION TO FOREIGN PRESS ASSOCIATION TO VISIT SFM FEB 19 TO WITNESS AREA CAMP PULLBACK AND ASSOCIATION'S DESIRE ALSO TO VISIT SFM CAMP (TEL AVIV 1069). WITH JOURNALISTS ALREADY COMING, THORNE HAD HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO AGREE (CAIRO 1917). I REMINDED HIM, MOREOVER THAT CBS,ABC AND NBC TV CREWS FROM ISRAEL HAD VISITED SFM SITE TWO WEEKS AGO. INDICATIVE OF STRONG PRESS INTEREST IN MATTER, WHEN INITIALLY REFUSED BY THORNE, TV COMPANIES HAD EVENTUALLY TAKEN MATTER TO WHITE HOUSE. LATTER, IN DEFERENCE TO HIGH DEGREE OF AMERICAN PUBLIC INTEREST IN USG PRESENCE IN SINAI, HAD NO PRACTICAL CHOICE BUT TO AGREE. FAHMY MUST EXPECT THIS PUBLIC INTEREST TO CONTINUE. WHILE RECOGNIZING GOE

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SENSITIVIEIES, I URGED EGYPTIANS ALSO UNDERSTAND NEED TO SATISFY LEGITIMATE PRESS INTEREST IN THIS OPERATION.

5. FAHMY WAS ADAMANT. HE HAD NO OBJECTION TO IDF INVITATION TO WITNESS ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL, BUT INSISTEDVISIST TO SFM SITE IS SUBJECT TO USG APPROVAL AND SHOULD NOT BE GIVEN. GOE, HE

STATED, WANTS TO MINIMIZE PUBLICITY FOR AMERICAN PRESENCE. SINAI II HAS GIVEN GOE ENOUGH PROBLEMS AND USG SHOULD NOT AGGRAVATE POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES EGYPT FACES AS A RESULT OF THAT AGREEMENT. HE ASKED THAT I BRING MATTER TO YOUR ATTENTION IMMEDIATELY AND THAT, IF YOU CONSIDER IT NECESSARY, YOU TAKE IT UP WITH THE PRESIDENT. GOE, HE REPEATEDLY STRESSED, IS DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT PUBLICITY ASPECTS OF SFM.

6. I AGREED TO CONVEY HIS MESSAGE, BUT ALSO REMINDED HIM THAT EGYPT HAS OBTAINED TANGIBLE BENEFITS FROM SINAI II. THIS SIMPLY LED HIM BACK TO A RECITAL OF HOW HE HAD WARNED US ABOUT CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT WE WERE ASKED SADAT TO ACCEPT. AS WE WOULD RECALL, HE HAD OPPOSED SIGNING SINAI II AS IT WAS WORDED AND HAD SO ADVISED SADAT. ALTHOUGH THE PRESIDENT HAD OVERRULED HIM, SADAT IS NOW ALSO BEGINNING TO RECOGNIZE POLITICAL LIABILITIES WHICH SINAI II HAS IMPOSED UPON HIM. IF USG MEANS WHAT IT SAYS ABOUT WANTING TO STRENGTHEN SADAT'S POSITION IN ARAB WORLD, IT SHOULD AVOID ACTIONS WHICH CAN ONLY LEAD TO FURTHER TARNISHING OF THE PRESIDENT'S POLITICAL IMAGE.

7. I AGAIN EMPHASIZED TO FAHMY OUR DESIRE TO STRENGTHEN SADAT'S POSITION IN ARAB WORLD. AT SAME TIME, I STRESSED THAT ALL OF US MUST RECOGNIZE LEGITIMATE PRESS INTEREST IN AMERICAN PRESENCE IN SINAI. WE MUST WORK OUT SOME HAPPY COMPROMISE TO MEET EGYPTIAN SENSITIVITIES AND USG REQUIREMENTS. FAILURE TO DO SO WILL ONLY
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GENERATE ADVERSE PUBLICITY, WHICH IS IN NEITHER OF OUR INTERESTS.

8. SINCE FAHMY HAS TAKEN SUBJECT OUT OF DIRECT EGYPTIAN MILITARY/THORNE LEVEL AND ASKED THAT I BRING IT TO YOUR PERSONAL ATTENTION, I AM DOING SO. I HAVE SHOWN THIS MESSAGE TO THORNE, WHO IS AWAITING INSTRUCTIONS FROM DEPT ON PROPOSED FEB 22 CEREMONY AND PRESS REQUESTS TO VISIT SITE.
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